Full Text of Dr. Weizmann's Keynote Address at 22nd World Zionist Congress - 10-Dec-46

Delegates to the twenty-second Congress:

We were well aware that one of the decisive hours in the history of mankind was upon us, and we accepted its gravity with fear and hope. We dreaded the impending holocaust which would descend upon all nations great and small, and we hoped that a better world would emerge from the ruins.

It seemed to us then that we had no illusions as to the cost which victory would exact. We thought that we could foresee the magnitude of the toll to be paid before the Nazi onslaught on civilization was repulsed. But we were convinced that the future would justify our trust, that a world order based on the rights of peoples and individuals would be built by the victors, after the challenge of brute force was crushed. Nor did we deem it as too much to believe that in the agency of struggle the world would learn the meaning of the lessons which, in the first portion, had been the torture of the Jews.

Now, in the light of present events, the bitter truth must be spoken. We feared too little and we hoped too much. We underestimated the bestialities of the enemy and overestimated the humanity, wisdom and the sense of justice of our friends. The shadow of tragic bereavement is upon us tonight. The great mass of European Jewry has been engulfed in a tidal wave; its controls of life and culture have been ravaged, its inhabitants laid waste. The greatest malice in the annals of inhumanity was turned against us, and found our people without hope or defense. Six millions have been consumed in a great process of annihilation whose dimensions dwarf all the massacres and persecutions which history records.

We cannot measure our loss in terms of those imponderable values whereby human beings enrich the thought and spirit of mankind. It is sufficient that we remember our dead as our own kith and kin - men, women an children whose destiny was linked to ours by a long chain of historic tradition reaching back to

the birth of Jewish civilization. Our tradition has always embodied the liberal spirit, the freedom of man's conscience and intellect, the sanctity of life, the revolt against idolatrous authority. When a violent onslaught was made against these values, its greatest fury fell upon us. Being homeless and dispersed, we were helpless to resist, and impotent to challenge; and six million graves testify to the consequences of our homelessness.

Other peoples who were not homeless like ourselves were cruelly attacked by the same onslaught, but none suffered in equal degree. Today they are liberated; their yoke is shaken off. Secure in the possession of their land and hearth, they arise to rebuild their ruins, and to enter once more upon a lease of free national life.

We asked that when disaster fell upon our people in Europe the gates of the National Home should not be shut in the face of these who survived. History will judge whether this was an exorbitant demand; and in the judgment it will record the effects of its rejection. For in the moment of our direst need, a British Government shut the doors of our home in our face, defying every liberal voice in its own country, and flouting the terms of the Mandate which was the legal basis of its rule.

I have a little more to say about the White Paper, which added no little to our disaster in Europe, and is directly responsible for the present troubled situation in Palestine. Few documents in history have worse consequences for which to answer. I could say nothing about its political and moral character which would ring as eloquently as the denunciations which Ministers of the present Government hurled against it.

For six long years, while the butchery was going on in Europe, we continually drew attention to the possibilities of rescue. Whenever a new country in Eastern Europe or the Balkans was about to come under Gestapo rule, we asked that the gates of the National Home be opened so that our children and youth might be saved from the imminent furnace and gas-chamber. We were refused.

It seemed that the White Paper was more sacred to some people than life itself Sometimes we were told that our exclusion from Palestine was necessary in order told justice to a nation possessed of seven independent territories covering a million square miles. At other times, we were informed that the admission of our fugitives might, in time of war, lead to certain dangers to military security. It was easier to keep these people out than to evolve some technique for overcoming imaginary security difficulties. When human need and the instinct of self-preservation collided with the White Paper, the result was the Strums and the Mauritius.

Our grief was increased by the circumstance that the great nation which was deaf to our appeal and to its own obligations at our most critical hour was Great Britain – whose bonds of sympathy and alliance with us had been drawn tight and close by the Balfour Declaration in 1917.

It was difficult – it is still difficult – for many of us to believe that Britain would continue to set the White Paper above international obligation and above the dictates of humanity and justice. We said and believed that this was a passing phase, a nightmare during which the liberal conscience of Britain was dulled by the clash and tension of international malaise.

It was the destiny of our movement to warn Jewry and mankind of the perils to which we were exposed by reason of our dispersion and homelessness, and our lack of a place, as a nation, among the nations of the world. As the peril drew nearer, our warning became more urgent, more insistent; our voice had in it a tone of desperation Ten years ago. I spoke in your name to a Royal Commission of these very millions who have since perished: “The Jewish misery affects the fate of six million people…. They cannot go out, they cannot find employment, there is nobody who is concerned for them. They are doomed, they are exasperated, they are in despair.”

We suspended our struggle against the White Paper and threw all our resources into the pool of the Allied war effort. Thirty thousand of our people voluntarily enlisted in the Forces, and the resources of our science and

industry were offered freely to the common cause.

We felt entitled to hope that the victory of the ideals for which we were all fighting would automatically destroy the White Paper and annul its spirit. For in a new world where principles of equity were to be armed with the power of universal law, how could our demand for equality among the nations be any longer refused? What further demonstration could be required of the perils of dispersion, now that the blood of our millions cried out to Heaven?

We were encouraged in this belief by the words of British statesmen, and by the fine promises of the Labor Party which was then aspiring to office and responsibility for the conduct of affairs. It seemed incredible that anybody could be playing fast and loose with us when we were so battered and exhausted. How could people thus lead us astray and hold their heads up again?

Yet this White Paper continues to exert pernicious influence over the political atmosphere of the National Home, even though the Prime Minister stated that his government is not bound by it. We welcome that statement of principle even though we wished they were expressed in concrete acts. The grant of 1,500 certificates a month is a slight dent in the White Paper, but that document must not only be dented, but entirely swept away and the ground cleared for a constructive solution. The bond of friendship between the Jewish people and Great Britain is one of the fine conceptions born from the Balfour Declaration which the White Paper all but destroyed.

It is a matter for deep regret among those of us who see in the British connection the main guarantee of security and stability. But the rupture is not of our making and cannot be healed by ourselves alone. It is not a necessary or inevitable breach.

It is, I am sure, unnecessary for me to say that the moment when the British Government undertakes to carry out the provisions of the mandate in the spirit and letter, the strain among us will ease. It is not a tension arising out of any

fundamental conflict of interests. The sanctity of international obligations – the principle that fired Britain through perils of two great wars – cannot casually be laid aside in dealing with the Jewish people.

If there is antagonism in the Yishuv directed against the British Government, it is not a token of deep-rooted desire to drive Britain out of her position in Palestine. It shows our indignation with Britain's deviation from the mandatory trust. We cannot support or condone our own betrayal and must strive with all strength to avert it – even if the odds are against us, even if we must defend the citadel of justice unaided and alone.

Despite all encouragement, we kept alive the hope of redress, and went on consolidating the Yishuv's position in agricultural settlement and industrial enterprise. In this latter sphere, we achieved results which confirmed sanguine hopes that the country's absorptive capacity would expand more rapidly than we used to expect.

You will hear detailed reports of the progress made in every branch of our constructive endeavor. It is an impressive sign of our people's capacity to create new forms and opportunities of life even in the most dispiriting political circumstances.

Yet we are unable to acquiesce in a process whereby we push our burden uphill all the way, with nothing but obstruction from those whose duty it is to “facilitate the establishment of a Jewish National Home.”

We are told that our aspirations must be thwarted because they clash with the interests of the Arab world. The Arab-Jewish relationship is too often envisaged in terms of incompatibility and conflict.

It was not always so. The Peace Settlement after the first World War opened out a great area of national opportunity to the Arab peoples, who had for centuries been subjected to Turkish rule. They were now to advance towards the possession of full sovereign rights from the East Mediterranean to the Persian Gulf, from the Taurus Mountains to the Indian Ocean.

This territory included all the historic centres which had become illustrious through their connection with the Arab and Muslim tradition. Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, and the Holy Cities of Arabia were soon to be free; and they owed their freedom to the liberating armies of the Western Powers.

Were not the Western Powers, with the sanction of the highest international tribunal, entitled to offer a chance of national independence to the Jews in that tiny segment of the Near East which had been the cradle and focus of our tradition and aspiration? To neglect their vast possessions and covet the smaller opportunity available to the Jews is not a liberal attitude for the Arabs to assume; especially as we derive our rights from the same historic sanction, the same international award, which conferred statehood and sovereignty upon them.

Arab nationalist leaders such as Feisal, and their British friends and advisers, such as Sykes and Lawrence, saw the problem of equity in this true proportion. They also saw that enlightened self-interest would enable the Arab peoples to derive much advantage from the exertions and example of a developing Jewish society. The condition which they stipulated was that the Arab world outside Palestine be enabled to achieve its independence and unity.

This condition was beyond fulfilment then, through circumstances quite beyond our control. But it is now on the brink of fulfilment. The Arab people now possess seven independent sovereignties they have a generous measure of representation in

By what tortuous logic can our morsel be stolen and added to their feast? How can it be moderate for them to claim seven states and extreme for us to claim one who our lack of national status has left us exposed to all the gusts of reaction and oppression which have blown across the face of the world?

Before the whole world I have said: Our work has brought no injury to the Arab peoples. Against the sterile assumption of conflict we set the higher conceptic of potential accord. We wish to bring Jewish effort into harmony with the wider

interests of the Middle East. But if we are to do this, the respect which we give to the national rights of others must be recognized for us.

We are not in Palestine as a collection of individuals; we are a society with national attributes. There can be no peace if an effort is made to suppress our community's distinctive character. There will be peace if, instead of suppression, we are offered self-expression.

In a recent letter to H.M. King Ibn Sa'aud, the President of the United States asserts that it is not against the interests of the Arab world to urge the immigration of Jews and the recognition of the Jewish National Home in Palestine.

I wholeheartedly concur in that opinion. It was timely for these words to be addressed to a distinguished representative of the Arab and Muslim worlds. The Arabs have nothing to gain by engaging in sterile conflict with us; for by according us our place in the ethnic pattern of the Middle East, they can make the Jewish world their loyal partner in the great tasks of development and regeneration to which they and we are called.

I have mentioned the name of President Truman, and here I would like to express our deep appreciation for the sympathy and support which the President and the Government of the United States consistently lent to our cause in these difficult days. Wherever American influence has been brought to bear for our problem – whether in treatment of our survivors in Europe or in wider issues of preservation and development of the Jewish National Home – we have felt the great liberal impulses of that great country to be warmly alive. For all this, we are deeply grateful to the American Government and the American people.

Before I turn to the principles which guide us in our search for a solution, I must pause at this stage to say a few words about the means which we use to attain our Zionist ends.

I do not under-estimate the cruel pressures which have been at work on the

minds of our youth, and given rise to a feeling of despair. Our young man and women in Palestine are responsive to generous ideals which summon them to exertion, and, if need be, to sacrifice. In the testing hour of war they showed their fine mottle. No hazard was too extreme, no peril too fearful for them. They offered themselves gallantly to danger, as they have so often given themselves to hardship in pushing the frontiers of civilisation ever deeper into the desert. They have the chivalry which puts personal safety and interest below the appeal of a general cause.

It was the cruel destiny of our young generation to see their kinsmen brutally murdered in Europe while they stood by, helpless and impotent. The White Paper policy prevented them from rising to the rescue; and later that policy forbade them to receive the few survivors whom Providence had spared. In their native homeland, the country of the National Home, they found themselves excluded on racial grounds from all but five per cent of the land.

A new Government which had promised redress came to power in England, and mobilized its armies and fleets to hunt down the pathetic shiploads of Jewish refugees who sought a haven where they were entitled to seek it – amongst their own people in the internationally guaranteed National Home. The spirit which is called patriotism in other nations was deemed fanaticism in them. They saw an attempt to stunt the growth of their enterprise; to out them off from their connections and support in the Jewish Dispersion, to hand them over to Arab rule.

As the years of war drew on, their minds were assailed by authentic details of unspeakable acts perpetrated upon these nearest and dearest to them. Whon peace came, there was liberation and security – except for the Jews. Finally, when the immigration of 100,000 displaced Jews was made contingent on the findings of an impartial Anglo-American Committee, the positive verdict of that Committee was evaded, and remains unfulfilled up to this day.

It is difficult in such circumstances to retain a belief in the victory of peaceful ideals, in the supremacy of moral values. And yet I affirm, without any

hesitation, that we have to retain it. Our Movement is a modern expression of the liberal ideal. Divorced from that ideal, it loses all purpose, all hope. Whon we invoke the Jewish tradition as support for our national claim, we are not free to shake off the restraints of that tradition and embark on courses which Jewish morality cannot condone.

Assassination, ambush, kidnapping, the murder of innocent men, wanton destruction of life and property, are alien to the spirit of Zionism. Jews came to Palestine to build, not to destroy. When men with such a mission abandon it for barren violence they perform a monstrous distortion of historic truth. Terrorism insults our history; it mocks the ideals for which a Jewish society must stand; it contaminates our banner; it compromises our appeal to the world's liberal conscience. It is futile to invoke the national struggles of other nations as examples for ourselves. Not only are the circumstances different, but our purposes, too, are unique.

Each people must apply its own standards to its conduct, and we are left with the task of weighing our actions in the scales of the Jewish spirit. Nor must our judgment be dazzled by the glare of self-conscious heroism. Bar-Cochba was in the heroic tradition; but Massada was a disaster in our history. It is not our purpose or our right to plunge to destruction in order to bequeath a legend of martyrdom to posterity.

Zionism was to mark the end of our deaths and the beginning of a new path whose watchword is life. Against the “heroics” of suicidal violence. I urge the courage of endurance, the heroism of superhuman restraint. I admit that it requires stronger characters, more virile nerves than are needed for militarist adventures. Whether they can rise to that genuine courage above the moral cowardice of terrorism is the challenge which history issues to our Youth.

For my part I am convinced that terrorist acts, apart from being morally abhorrent, are also barren of all advantage. They expose our hard-won

achievements to the prospect of destruction, and they lead us to a bottomless abyss of nihilism and despair. These people, happily few, who arrogate to themselves the right to involve a whole people in the responsibility of their undisciplined acts are gambling with the Jewish future.

The Yishuv, through its elected institutions, has resolved to rise up against these vicious movements which threaten its good name and its very survival; and this Congress will surely support the Yishuv in its steadfast resolve. The builders of the Jewish future are not these who plot murder in dark places, but these who went out into the Southern Desert of the Negev and planted a dozen villages in testimony to the constructive purposes of Zionism, its resilience and its hope.

I now turn to the question which has been agitating the minds of Jews the world over during past months. This question is our political culture in Palestine. Five years ago, under the shadow of the impending Jewish tragedy. I wrote; “The Jewish State in Palestine will be more than a merely necessary means of securing further Jewish immigration. It is a moral need and postulate and would be a decisive step towards normality and true emancipation. I believe that after the war, Jews everywhere can gain in status and security only through the rise of a Jewish State.”

If this was true in 1941, it is even more true today. This is the logical climax to the Balfour Declaration as the authors always understood it. Our claim for a state is sometimes represented as an act of extremism. What is natural for Bulgarians. Armenians, Transjordanians and many other national groups, which have no greater claim themselves upon the conscience of the world, is somehow regarded as an unreasonable benefaction for Jews.

We refuse to accept this inequality. We ask for free scope in which to develop our national culture. And the culture of a nation comprises not only its literature and art but also its political institutions, its conception of economic organizations and existence of a field of social experiment. These things, which

all other nations possess, we claim in the name of equality and of our sufferings for ourselves.

Believing as we do that our claim to establish a Jewish state is justified by the mandate and by the relative positions of the Arab world and ourselves, we cannot contemplate a solution that falls short of that claim. Establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine offers the possibility of absorbing the remnants of the Jewish communities in Europe within a relatively short time without by any means exhausting the possibilities of the country to take in Jewish immigrants from the Middle East, or elsewhere.

The first problem of our generation is absorption of a million and a quarter European survivors, the overwhelming majority of whom are desperately pressing against the gates of Palestine. Only the immediate establishment of a Jewish state offers the prospect of doing this. It is essential that development of Palestine's resources should be entrusted to a Jewish authority possessing the intention and requisite power to carry that development through at a dynamic rate.

Experience has taught us that there is no other authority as capable of promoting development and reconstruction at a rate commensurate with our need and the country's full capacity. The Jews must be vested with the privileges and responsibilities to direct the government. The Jewish people must be enabled to seek admission at long last to the society of nations. Once secure in possession of a full national status we shall strive to enter into a free harmonious relationship with the other states in the Middle East.

In dealing with the problem of Palestine there are two courses and only two courses open to Great Britain which would enable her to fulfill her obligations and inaugurate a new era of peaceful development in that country.

One alternative is a return to the mandate as it was conceived by those who drew it up - the return to a period of free immigration limited only by the economic capacity of the country. The report of the Anglo-American Committee

of Inquiry, with not all of which we agree, contains certain specific proposals which would once again breathe life and spirit into the Mandate.

In the first place, immediate immigration of 100,000 Jews from Europe has been consistently urged by the U.S. Government on the basis of careful inquiries in Europe, supplemented by a rigorous investigation carried out by the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry itself. Subsequent discussions of this project by expert committees revealed that the project is well capable of early fulfillment. Difficulties of finance and transport are not insuperable and the moral weight of the Jewish people and of world public opinion would give momentum to this gesture of humanity, which would at the same time improve the atmosphere in Palestine. Seldom has a measure recommended so widely and impersonally been opposed with so little benefit or cause.

A return to the mandate implies also a continuation of immigration after the entry of the 100,000 up to the full economic level of the country's power of absorption, and the institution of development schemes by irrigation and intensive cultivation for the benefit of the country as a whole. These measures together with a policy of encouraging Palestine's growing industries would substitute an atmosphere of optimism and expansion for the present dark apprehension which broods ever the land.

Another measure implicit in the return to the Mandate was likewise recommended by the Anglo-American Committee-the abolition of the land ordinances which denied Jews in Palestine the right of possession or even access to something like nine-tenths of the country. This act of discrimination has few parallels, I believe, in the statute books of the world. It is particularly indefensible in view of the fact that Arab cultivators who it professes to protect are tilling more land with more productive results today than before our colonisation began.

The notice “No Jews Admitted” over nine-tenths of the territory of the Holy Land is an affront to the human conscience. It must be removed together with the rest of the White Paper's evil heritage. If the White Paper is thus consigned

to oblivion, many of its worst consequences will perish with its rebirth of emergency regulations, arbitrary arrests and detentions, suppression

They will be remembered only as a nightmare and here perhaps, I feel I must say that we also remember, as indeed we always do, that it was Britain first among the great powers which set her hand to righting an ancient wrong and to open for us the possibility of rebuilding our land. Despite our grievances and temporary tensions, we shall cherish with abiding gratitude this historic act.

I cannot underestimate the difficulties of Great Britain, but if the mandatory power fools unable to fulfill the main condition of its trust, its only alternative is to devise a new settlement in which the purposes of the Mandate are substantially fulfilled. It is morally bound to leave Palestine in a state of finality by drawing up proposals for sound constitutional development. A sound constitutional structure can only be one which recognises the existence of a Jewish nation side by side with an Arab nation.

The Jewish community in Palestine will never surrender its national attributes and its attachment to a national tradition in order to merge them into the attributes and traditions of another people. If Great Britain is unable to fulfill the tasks of the mandate, she should, I submit - before retiring - invest the national home with the full authority and status of a Jewish state.

As for the Arabs, the establishment of a Jewish state offers inducements of which we believe many of their most thoughtful representatives are keenly aware. It offers them finality - the assurance that the Zionist efforts are at work within a defined area. It will establish the possibility of an equal and dignified relationship between Arabs and Jews, whose states should find it to their interests to cooperate in the execution of joint development schemes and in the attainment of greater economic security.

This solution has, I suggest, the supreme merits of finality, independence and peace, which are all entirely lacking for all parties concerned in the so-called Morrison Plan of federal economy, which we must reject without hesitation or

reserve. We reject it both in principle and in detail–in principle because it is neither a final solution nor one which establishes the Jewish people in physical independence. It entirely excludes 80 to 85 percent of the country from the scope of Jewish colonization without even assuring us complete freedom in the 15 percent which would remain to us.

It is, therefore, very near total and final repudiation of the primary condition of the Mandate - to facilitate the establishment of a National Home in Palestine. All the provisions of the federal plan with regard to area, immigration and the right to vote potential developments imply an early crystallization of the Jewish National Home, and would make of it a stunted, crippled thing. This plan is not more than a slightly modified White Paper, and because we are opposed in principle to any plan of this kind, we see no purpose in discussing it in detail.

I am aware that establishment of a Jewish State is a bold, imaginative act. I am also aware that there is prejudice in some quarters against a final clear-cut solution, but the recent tragic history of Palestine does nothing to recommend a policy of uncertainty or fluidity.

Time is short and the need is pressing. We are summoned by history and the plight of our people to press for a solution that will give release to our constructive energy and intensify the processes which have rooted our people so deeply in their ancestral land. By industry, perseverance, courage, resolution, rejection of terrorism, renewal of faith in our movement's liberal ideas - by these and these alone shall we fulfill our duty to the destiny of our people and the advancement of mankind.

Follow delegates, 50 years have passed since Theodor Herzl projected the Judenstast. Today we are on the eve of the 50th anniversary of the first Zionist Congress held in this fair, hospitable city of Basle. Looking back ever the road we have travelled in these few generations, we sometimes wonder whether our achievements correspond to the high hopes which inspired the first Congress.

It is well for us to remember that we were a handful of men - without means,

influence and experience, without the support of the most powerful Clements of world Jewry. Let us remember, too, that despite the terrible losses we have sustained, this Congress represents more than 2,000,000 Jews, who by conscious acts have identified themselves with our movement and the Zionist ideal.

Through steady vision, unwavering courage and sacrifice and labor, our pioneers have in a large measure overcome the difficulties which confronted us. Our men and women drew sustenance, both spiritual and material, from the grudging soil.

We stand today 600,000 strong as a testimony to our faith and achievement - achievement in all fields of human endeavor: great institutions of learning, an ancient tongue remade, new cities and villages that have wrested life and happiness from misery and decay - testimony of the irresistible force which drives our people to become free men and women on the land of their fathers.

Let us pray that in unity and in singleness of purpose, we will achieve peace and freedom in Zion reborn.